

# Pragmatics Research Malaysian Context



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JARIAH MOHD JAN



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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

This book is a collection of articles contributed by researchers in the area of Pragmatics in the Malaysian context. We would like to thank the contributors for keeping to a tight schedule and submitting their contributions on time, and their patience in waiting for the final publication of the book. We would like to sincerely express our deep appreciation for their contributions towards the completion of the book.

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Trends in literature, linguistics and translation. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Nawal Fadhil Abbas & Raja Rozina (2012). Politeness in literary works: An overview. In Sarjit Kaur & Shakila Abdul Manan (Eds.), *Contemporary perspectives in English Language Studies*. Pulau Pinang: Penerbit USM and Rui Li & Raja Rozina (2017). Language proficiency and the speech act of complaint of Chinese EFL learners, *The Southeast Asian Journal of Language Studies*, Vol 23(1), 1-15.

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# PREFACE

Pragmatics is one of the core linguistic areas that has seen a rise in exploratory studies in their applications in different speech contexts. It is one of the most vibrant and rapidly growing fields in linguistics and the philosophy of language has been extensively explored globally. This book provides comprehensive and current research designs and methodologies in the contemporary landscape of pragmatics in Malaysia and its neighbouring regions. It comprises social and cultural macro-pragmatics studies, such as speech acts, politeness and impoliteness, as well as cross-cultural and inter-cultural pragmatics studies.

This book is a contribution by researchers, comprising academic lecturers and post-graduate students who have undertaken research on pragmatics from different perspectives, using different approaches and examining different speech contexts. The study of pragmatics involves investigating the use of language in social contexts and the ways in which people produce and comprehend meanings through language. In other words, pragmatics refer to the ways in which people use language in different social situations and the interpretation of the language in those particular speech contexts. C.W. Morris coined the term pragmatics in the 1930s and pragmatics was later developed as a sub-field of linguistics in the 1970s. Since then, there has been a wealth of studies on pragmatics. Language data have been collected via discourse completion tests (DCTs), interviews, spontaneous speech and more recently, data from interactions found in the social media; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and blogs. Various pragmatic theories, ideas and methodological approaches are then applied to analyse linguistics and pragmatics features in these authentic data of different genres.

The collection of eight articles in this book suggests that there is considerable diversity of theoretical frameworks and methodologies in the study of pragmatics. The scope of the collection reveals the range of data that pragmatics analysis can address and will continue to examine. The data ranges from

different linguistic phenomena such as exploring the types of speech acts such as agreement and disagreement, request and apology strategies in media discourse and the social media, speech acts in an ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) settings to the study of impoliteness in parliamentary discourse in Malaysia and other regional contexts in Asia. Linguistics phenomenon such as repair strategies used among participants with speech impairment and the discursive strategies of support by support groups to those with infertility problems to discourses in dealing with homosexuality issues are explored and discussed. These diversities in the type of data that have been drawn upon suggest that pragmatics studies in Malaysia not only involve ordinary conversational interactions and interactions in the media, institutional or educational interactional contexts but also interactions with individuals dealing with specific issues.

**Siti Nurbaya Mohd Nor** examines the forms of agreement and disagreement interactions in a local radio phone-in programme. By referring to previous works in the identification of agreement and disagreement turn sequences in interactions (Pomerantz: 1984; Sacks: 1995; Dori\_hacohen: 2012; Walkinshaw: 2015), she demonstrates that patterns of interactions can be distinguished by the way the participants engage with each other in the interaction. She shows that that the two-sided agreement type and the neutral-type of interactions are the most prominent types in the data, while the two-sided disagreement types involve remarks such as disagreeing with prior speaker's opinions or statements or correcting some points of prior speaker's talk. This indicates that the conversational style of participants in this type of speech context favours a more considerate approach to rapport between speakers.

**Mohammad Azannee Saad and Jariah Mohd Jan** focus on the identification of repair strategies by children with a history of cleft lip and/or palate (CL/P) following initiation by their conversational partners in other-initiated repair sequence. They examine the linguistic resources that are used by children to construct the repair turn. Using the principle of Conversation Analysis (CA) and Philip's (2008) Repair Response (2008), they find that children have a limited ability to give immediate success to repair, in which a majority of their choice of strategy is inappropriate, due to their poor pragmatic functioning. The study provides evidence on the

interactional challenges of children with a history of CL/P that could benefit speech and language treatment plan.

**Raja Rozina Raja Suleiman and Marlyna Maros** offer a corpus-based study in looking at the concept of face in Malay Language and culture. The conceptualisation of face in Malay language and culture is based on Malay linguists' general assumptions about these concepts, as evident from the Malay language corpus built by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP). Four conceptual domains for the term *air muka* are used in order to categorise the concordance generated. The term *air muka* is used in each of the four domains, namely face as part of the body, face maintained, face as self-presentation and face as relational work. These suggest that the concept of *air muka* as proposed by Malay linguists can be further broadened beyond its conventional literal and figurative use.

**Thilagavathy Shanmuganathan** investigates the excuses constructed by Malaysian students who sent virtual text messages for various offenses to their lecturers and tutors. The study discusses how the rather brief virtual text messages which contain the apology and embedded excuses incorporates a reference to several contexts, particularly the context that elicited the offense and the current context in which the student seeks forgiveness and understanding from the lecturers. Her study highlights that the apology is direct, but excuses are proffered to mitigate the offense.

**Mohd Asyraf Zulkffli, Sarah Nadia Ahmad, Atirah Izzah Che Abas, Nurul Aadilah Salleh and Radzuwan Ab Rashid** examine the discursive strategies employed by homosexual Muslim subjects in their written discourse. The discourses of these subjects are in the context of expressing their struggles in managing their same-sex desire due to attachment to their Islamic faith. Using writing data from three subjects from the IIUM Confession website, they analyse the data through the methodological approach of Discursive Psychology (DP) and Discursive Action Model (DAM). They identify two themes in the data which are: the manifestation of homosexual desire as a problematic construct; and criticisms towards the community and religious institutions.

Pung Wun Chiew and Jariah Mohd Jan investigate the topics of peer support among women with infertility problems in a Malaysian online forum. They find that topics that emphasise camaraderie

among the women are particularly popular. However, unlike previous studies of social support, emotions are not given much attention. This may be indicative of the high level of sensitivity due to socio-cultural beliefs that the infertility problem poses to women in this part of the region.

**Nur Nadiah Fatihah Johari and Zalina Mohd Kassim** explore another pragmatic aspect on directives in advice columns in Men's and Women's Health Magazines. The exchange of advice in advice columns occurs in the forms of problem letters and advice letters. The advice given is classified as directive speech acts as the advice-giver directs the questioners to take action for their problems. The study investigates the forms and functions of directives performed by advice-giver in 60 advice columns in Ask Men's Health and Ask Women's Health magazines. As the forms and functions of directives are intricately related to the face protection, the study also identifies face-saving strategies employed in advice columns and the relationship between forms and functions of directives and the protection of the interlocutors' face. The differences and similarities in men's and women's directives and face-saving strategies are also discussed. Four types of directives are found in the advice columns of both men's and women's magazines: the imperatives, declaratives, imbedded forms and interrogatives. The study also reveals that men have preferences for explicit directives, while women prefer to use mitigated directives in advice-giving. The high frequency of imperatives illustrates the acceptability of directness in the advice texts of the advice columns.

The chapter by **Veronica Lowe** exposes the reader to a different situational context in the Malaysian parliament. Veronica explores three conventionalised forms of impoliteness used by members in the parliament (MPs), that is, insults, silencers, and message enforcers. Examples of remarks such as, the use of *Bangang* (Stupid), *Duduk!* (Sit Down!) and *Faham?* (Understand?), are illustrated in the discussion. Culpepper (2011: 23) defines impoliteness as behaviour that "is viewed negatively" and that "always have or are presumed to have emotional consequences for at least one participant, that is, they cause or are presumed to cause offence". Although Standing Order 36(4) of the of the Dewan Rakyat (the Lower House of the Malaysian parliament) states that "It shall be out of order for Members of the House to use offensive language or make a sexist remark", such language is not uncommon in the

Dewan. While the co-occurrence of politeness and impoliteness is characteristic of the British House of Commons, analysis of the data shows that the co-occurrence of politeness with insults, silencers and message enforcers is relatively rare in the Dewan. In addition, despite being required by the Standing Orders to address only the Chair, Malaysian MPs when being offensive, do address their targets directly using second person pronouns.

Studies on pragmatics need to be viewed in its social and cultural contexts, by taking into account the social practices associated with the use of the language, either in everyday life, in the context of language learning or in different institutional contexts. What is presented in this book is the present state of knowledge that delve into pragmatics and the possibility that it will provide the groundwork for future studies in this ever-evolving linguistic area.





# TOPICS OF SUPPORT AMONG WOMEN WITH INFERTILITY PROBLEMS

## 6

*Pung Wun Chiew and Jariah Mohd Jan<sup>2</sup>*

Defined as the inability to achieve clinical pregnancy after having regular, unprotected sexual intercourse for 12 months or longer (World Health Organization [WHO]: 2015), infertility is a global health problem irrespective of region, socio-economic level, ethnic group and religion. It affects about eight percent to 12 percent of couples worldwide (Bushnik, Cook, Yuzpe, Tough, & Collins: 2012), which is equivalent to about 80 million couples (Allahbadia: 2013). Infertility can affect both men and women, with approximately one third of infertility cases caused by female factors, another 30 percent by male factors, and the rest due to either a combination of both male and female factors, or unexplained causes (LaMotte: 2015).

Yet, the prevalence rate of infertility varies across countries (Boivin, Bunting, Collins, & Nyren: 2007), with majority of infertile couples in developing countries (Allahbadia: 2013; Ombelet: 2011), particularly those in the central and south Asian regions as well as in the north and sub-Saharan African regions (Mascarenhas, Flaxman, Boerma, Vanderpoel, & Stevens: 2012). Variations in the quality of infertility care and socio-cultural values pertaining to procreation and childlessness are two possible factors contributing to differences in infertility rates (Ombelet: 2011). In developing countries infertility is also perceived as taboo, and therefore, the number of infertile couples are in fact, much higher than reported (Rutstein & Iqbal: 2004). A report by WHO stated that there are more than 180 million couples who are silently suffering from infertility problems in developing countries (Rutstein & Iqbal: 2004).

In addition, the consequences of infertility are much graver in developing countries, especially in the Asian and African regions, compared to developed societies (Ombelet, Cooke, Dyer, Serour, & Devroey: 2008). Most Asian (Mason: 2001) and African countries (Bongaarts: 2016) are pro-natalist societies where procreation is given paramount importance in married couples (Mollen: 2014). Consequently, psychological and emotional effects of infertility such as the sense of social isolation, depression, guilt and shame are much more pronounced (Papreen, Sharma, Sabin, Begum, Ahsan, & Baqui: 2000), and in some cultures, childlessness could mean loss of social status (Deribe, Anberbir, Regassa, Belachew, & Biadgilign: 2007) and severe economic deprivation in old age (Inhorn & van Balen: 2002).

Moreover, childlessness is often not only an individual health problem, but also a social and public health issue (Gerrits & Shaw: 2010; van Balen & Gerrits: 2001). In some Asian (Kumar: 2007) and African (Dhont: 2011) cultures, it is permissible for men in childless marriages to have extramarital partners and practise polygamy (Daar & Merali: 2002; Dyer, Abrahams, Mokoena, Lombard, & van der Spuy: 2005), hence increasing the risk of contracting and spreading sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), syphilis, chlamydia and bacterial vaginosis (BV) (Dhont: 2011). Accordingly, there is often a correlation between infertility and STIs (Barden-O'Fallon: 2005; Ikechebelu, Ikegwuonu, & Joe-Ikechebelu: 2002).

Although infertility can be caused by both male and female factors, women usually take the blame of infertility in developing countries due to ignorance and social prejudices (Deribe et al.: 2007; Ombelet et al.: 2008). Most developing countries are patriarchal and patrilineal societies, as such, the society is structured in a way that men are superior to women and the wife's main roles are to bear children, especially sons to continue the family lineage and to nurture the household (Widge: 2002). The inability to procreate is considered "a personal tragedy and a curse" (Ombelet et al.: 2008:605). This has a negative impact on the women's relationships with spouses, family members, friends and other members in society (Ceballo, et al.: 2015). Barren married women in these countries often suffer traumatic and isolating life experiences; marital relationships may break down, and they are criticized, ostracised, neglected and in some extreme cases, starved, physically abused, killed or driven to suicide (Daar